

IFLA's ISBD Programme: Purpose, Process, and Prospects

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Let me begin by briefly covering the origins, purposes and coverage of the ISBDs.

The concept of the International Standard Bibliographic Description has now endured for nearly 35 years and has proved to be IFLA's most successful effort at promoting the cause of cataloguing standardization. One reason that explains why the ISBDs have flourished and remain essentially intact after more than a generation is the continuing influence of the forces that prompted their formulation in the first place. These include demands and opportunities arising from the automation of bibliographic control as well as the economic necessity of sharing cataloguing. Standardization of descriptive cataloguing has proved to be an economic and technological necessity to the creation, conversion, and use of machine-readable records. The ISBDs were also intended to serve as a principal component of IFLA's program to promote Universal Bibliographic Control, the ideal of which in Dorothy Anderson's words is "to make universally and promptly available, in a form which is internationally acceptable, basic bibliographic data for all publications issued in all countries."

The ISBDs seek to serve three primary purposes: First, and of greatest importance, they are intended to make it possible to interchange records from different sources. As subsidiary purposes, the ISBDs, secondly, have assisted in the interpretation of records across language barriers, so that records produced for users of one language can be interpreted by users of other languages. Thirdly, they have facilitated the conversion of bibliographic records to electronic form.

The first of the ISBDs to be published was the *International Standard Bibliographic Description for Monographic Publications (ISBD (M))*, which appeared in 1971. There have followed projects to produce ISBDs for Serials, Non-book material, Cartographic materials, Rare books, Printed music, and, most recently Electronic resources. For article level publications, *Guidelines for the application of the ISBDs to the description of component parts* was issued. The entire inventory of the ISBDs in all their editions is listed on IFLANET; in every case, at least the latest version of each ISBD is freely available in an HTML or PDF format¹. Along the way, the need for a general framework to which all the ISBDs would conform was felt, resulting in production of ISBD(G); the primary utility of G is that of ensuring harmony among the other ISBDs.

Schedule and procedures for issuance of new or revised ISBDs

Procedures are essential in all standardization work in order to ensure that the steps by which a document becomes a new or revised standard are well known and consistently followed. The ISBDs are no exception to this rule. As a result, at the 1989 IFLA Conference, the Section on Cataloguing adopted a schedule and established procedures for development and distribution of such documents

¹ <http://www.ifla.org/VI/3/nd1/isbdlist.htm>

as new or revised ISBDs. In 2002, these procedures were updated to take advantage of the opportunity for electronic publication of texts, both in draft and final form; to speed up the review process by using email to announce the availability of drafts for review; and to enable quicker return of comments and suggestions regarding these drafts to the ISBD Review Group.

Originally it was thought that each ISBD should be considered for updating on a five-year cycle. More pragmatically, they have been revised as the need has arisen to implement general applicable changes or by the evolution of library materials, such as those that resulted in publication of ISBD(ER) and, more recently, the ISBD for continuing resources.

There are essentially five phases in the development of a new and revised ISBD.

- Creation of draft text. During this phase, a working group may be appointed comprising cataloguing experts and, when appropriate, format specialists from both within and outside of IFLA, unless the Review Group believes that it itself possesses sufficient expertise to accomplish the objectives of the revision. Typically for every project, an editor is designated to prepare the text according to the decisions of the working group.
- Worldwide review. Once a draft text is completed, it is ready for worldwide review and comment. At this point, the text is forwarded for posting on IFLANET. Thereupon, an announcement is sent to IFLA-L and other appropriate electronic networks. Normally, two months are allowed for review of an ISBD undergoing revision and usually an additional month if the text is entirely new.
- Final revision. All comments are considered. In accordance with the group decisions, the editor revises the draft. At this point, special attention is given to provision of examples in a variety of languages in the text and appendices and the preparation of an index. When a final text is determined, the ISBD Review Group as a whole goes over the text, primarily to ensure conformance with ISBD(G).
- Balloting. The final version of the new or revised ISBD is then sent to the Cataloguing Section's Standing Committee and any co-sponsoring Section. The ballot provides only two options: to approve or to disapprove. However, editorial and sometimes more substantive comments are conveyed; these are considered. Ballots not returned by close of voting are considered to be affirmative votes. One month is allowed for this phase.
- Publication and workshop. If the outcome is a vote of approval as is typically the case, the text is scheduled for publication. Today, in all cases, the text is issued electronically, although the e-text may be delayed at the request of the publisher if the text is also to be published in print. As the final step in the process in the case of new ISBDs or those extensively revised, a workshop may be held in conjunction with an IFLA conference to promote understanding and use of the publication.

Although, as already mentioned, some ISBDs have been developed or revised to meet particular needs, there have been two overall revision campaigns affecting the entire Family of ISBDs. Such occurs when changes are determined that have an across-the-board effect.

First General Review Project

The initial overall revision resulted in the creation of the ISBD Review Committee, which first met in August 1981. The Committee established three major objectives set out for the first general review project:

- (1) to harmonize provisions, achieving increased consistency,
- (2) to improve examples, and,
- (3) to make the provisions more applicable to cataloguers working with materials published in non-roman scripts.

In addition, two narrower objectives motivated this particular revision effort:

- (1) to review the use of the equals sign (as its use in bibliographic descriptions had been the source of some controversy); and,
- (2) to remove coverage of machine-readable material from the ISBD for Non-Book Materials.

By the end of the decade, the ISBDs had been re-published in “Revised editions.” In addition, a separate ISBD was created for Computer Files, which, because of rapid advances in technology, was soon superseded by creation of an ISBD for Electronic Resources.

Second General Review Project

In the early 1990s, the Cataloguing Section in cooperation with other Sections set up the Study Group on the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR). One immediate consequence of this development was the decision to suspend most revision work on the ISBDs while the FRBR Group pursued its charge to “recommend a basic level of functionality and basic data requirements for records created by national bibliographic agencies.” This decision resulted in permanent suspension of a project to identify the components of a “Concise ISBD(M)”, because it was expected that FRBR’s findings would in effect provide such a baseline.

In 1998, the FRBR Study Group published its Final Report², and the ISBD Review Group was reconstituted to initiate a full-scale review of the ISBDs in order to implement FRBR’s recommendations for a basic level national bibliographic record.

In the ISBDs, national bibliographic agencies are called upon to “prepare the definitive description containing all the mandatory elements set out in the relevant ISBD insofar as the information is applicable to the publication being described.” To facilitate implementation of this principle, the ISBDs designate as “optional” those data elements that are not mandatory when applicable. Therefore, the main task in pursuing the second general review has entailed a close look at the ISBD data elements that are now mandatory in order to make optional any that are optional in FRBR.

² <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s13/frbr/frbr.htm>

The ISBD Review Group has completed work on three of the ISBDs – ISDB(M), ISBD(CR) and ISBD(G). The Review Group is currently updating three: the ISBD for Cartographic Materials; the ISBD for Antiquarian books, and the ISBD for Electronic Resources. However, except for ISBD(A), these current projects have been put on hold for one year, pending development of the Consolidated Version of the ISBDs, a project I will discuss further later in this presentation.

Thus, for more than three decades, IFLA's ISBD program has yielded standards for representing bibliographic data for all types of library materials and maintained these standards through one or more revisions. The ISBDs have been officially translated into Arabic, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Dutch, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Ukrainian. In turn, the ISBDs have guided the work of national cataloguing committees in updating their codes to foster internationally accepted practices, a point underscored by the compilations of practices by various rules and AACR that was prepared for the 2003 and 2004 meetings of Cataloguing Experts³. While it is true that in some cases, national rules do not conform to the provisions of the ISBDs in every detail, the general impression is overall compliance and considerable harmony among themselves and with IFLA's recommended practices. Today's publication patterns are changing, largely as a result of the electronic environment in which we increasingly function. As interest in metadata to promote control and access to electronic resources increases, the ISBDs will enjoy new opportunities to influence content and use of these schemas, since most of them will define data elements already familiar to the ISBDs. On the other hand, not only are there new bibliographic situations to consider, but also not every bibliographic practice already in place continues to be as useful now as it was formerly.

Therefore, it is necessary for IFLA to continue to keep the Family of ISBDs abreast of current requirements and to pursue further doing so in cooperation with national bibliographic agencies and national and multi-national cataloguing committees.

Current priorities and activities

Let us turn next to the current priorities and activities of the ISBD Review Group. First, there is the matter of terminology used in the ISBDs in contrast to that used in FRBR, which has raised the question as to whether such terms as “work,” “expression,” “manifestation,” and “item” should be introduced in place of such terms as “publication.” On the one hand, such changes would be a logical extension of the Review Group's charge to implement FRBR to the largest extent practicable. One might conclude that since the principles of FRBR are already widely understood and applied, incorporation of its terminology might foster better comprehension of the ISBDs throughout the information community and encourage interoperability with other standards. But, on the other hand, as Patrick Le Boeuf argued at the Frankfurt IME ICC in his paper on “Brave new FRBR world: “FRBR terminology should *not* be merely incorporated such as it stands into the ISBDs and cataloguing rules, but [these] should keep their own specific terminology, and provide accurate definitions showing how each term in this specific terminology is conceptually related to the FRBR terminology”.

³ http://www.ddb.de/news/pdf/code_comp_2003_europe_2.pdf and http://www.loc.gov/loc/ifla/imeicc/source/code-comparisons_final-summary.pdf

The Review Group concluded that it was essential for IFLA to clarify the relationship between the ISBDs and the FRBR model. The group encountered difficulties in trying to achieve that alignment, owing in large part to the fact that the terms used in FRBR were defined in the context of an entity-relationship model conceived at a higher level of abstraction than the specifications for the ISBDs. While the entities defined in the FRBR model are clearly related to the elements forming an ISBD description, they are not necessarily congruent in all respects and the relationships are too complex to be conveyed through a simple substitution of terminology. The Group thus decided that development of a table to detail the relationship of each of the elements specified in the ISBDs to its corresponding entity attribute or relationship as defined in the FRBR model would satisfy the need to make clear that the ISBDs and FRBR themselves enjoy a harmonious relationship. Since Die Deutsche Bibliothek had volunteered to support ISBD maintenance and development as its ICABS⁴ responsibility, the IFLA Cataloguing Section asked DDB to fund this project. Tom Delsey was recruited on contract to develop the mapping, and the Cataloguing Section's Standing Committee approved the resulting document entitled "Mapping ISBD Elements to FRBR Entity Attributes and Relationships" on July 9, 2004. The "Mapping" document is available on IFLA's Web site.⁵

Nevertheless, the ISBD Review Group did decide to introduce some changes in terminology, beginning with the recently revised ISBD(G). Among them is the use of the term "resource" rather than "item" or "publication". "Resource" is given a specific definition in 0.2 of the ISBD(G). The use of the former term "item" is different from the term "item" as used in FRBR, but it is not difficult to confuse them. This led to the decision to use "resource." This decision is consistent with that of the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR, which is also moving ahead with "resource" as the general term.

In another area of effort, the ISBD Review Group has been attempting to provide improved guidance regarding the use of the ISBDs for bibliographic description of publications in multiple formats, for example, an e-book or serially issued maps. Recognizing the increasing incidence of resources published in more than one physical medium, and the challenges that these publications pose for bibliographic control, the Review Group appointed a task force charged to investigate three topics in particular:

- (1) use of multiple ISBDs and use of multiple general material designations ([GMDs]),
- (2) the order in which elements for multiple formats should be treated, and
- (3) the number of bibliographic records to be created for multiple versions.

The Review Group discussed these issues at its 2003 meeting in Berlin and reached the conclusion that the ISBDs should urge national bibliographic agencies and libraries participating in networks to create separate bibliographic descriptions for works issued in multiple formats. This practice would facilitate record exchange, one of the basic purposes of the ISBDs. Other libraries would be authorized to select a single-record approach when they wish. This recommendation in effect addressed a recommendation emanating from Working Group 4 at the Frankfurt IME ICC. The Review Group also discussed the use of multiple GMDs, deciding to

⁴ IFLA-CDNAL Alliance for Bibliographic Standards

⁵ <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s13/pubs/ISBD-FRBR-mappingFinal.pdf>

postpone a decision on the matter until broader issues could be identified and evaluated.

As a result of these discussions, the Review Group set up a Material Designation Study Group, to develop an outline of problems and issues, taking into account relevant recommendation from IME ICC Working Group 5, which studied closely related issues and rendered useful recommendations. Also, the Material Designation Study Group will consider relevant developments arising from revision of AACR.

With Lynne Howarth as chair, the Material Designations Study Group began discussions on two issues that had been identified for further work during the IFLA WLIC 2005 conference in Oslo, namely:

- placement of the general material designation [GMD]
- identification, clarification, and definition of content and nomenclature of the GMD, area 3, area 5, and area 7

It had become clear that the Study Group work on terminology and nomenclature would need to parallel and complement the work of the Study Group on the Future Directions of the ISBDs (to be discussed next) as it prepares, first, the harmonized text, and, subsequently, the consolidated ISBD. The Study Group decided that, as individual areas of the harmonized text are completed, it will examine and evaluate terminology used currently in the authorized ISBDs and make recommendations for the content and terminology to be used in the GMD, and areas 3, 5, and 7 as appropriate in the proposed consolidated ISBD.

Having addressed the terminology/nomenclature issue, the Study Group then turned its attention to problems associated with where to place or locate within the record the general material designation. During its meeting last year in Buenos Aires, the Group had agreed on the importance and primacy of the GMD as an “early warning device” for catalogue users,. Consequently, the Study Group focused its discussion on consideration of a separate, unique ISBD area for the GMD. During its Oslo meeting, the Study Group remained sensitive to the implications of a so-called “area 0” for record formats, vendor software, and OPAC/WebPAC displays. Nonetheless, after thoughtful and wide-ranging discussion, it formalized a recommendation that the ISBD Review Group approved at Oslo, as follows.

The Study Group put forward the following statement, which was approved by the Review Group at its August 18th meeting in Oslo: “Recognizing the ongoing difficulties with the current optionality, terminology, and location/placement of the general material designation [GMD], and anticipating that the Future Directions Study Group may be working towards producing a consolidated ISBD for which a Document Type Definition (DTD) can then be developed, the Material Designation Study Group proposes the creation of a separate, unique, high level component (not a numbered ISBD area) – a “content/carrier” or “content/medium” designation that would be mandatory – i.e., not optional as with the current GMD -- for recording in bibliographic records.

“The Material Designation Study Group emphasizes that this component is independent of system displays – that is, different systems can display the recorded content of the “content/carrier” or “content/medium” designation as each system vendor or client institution

determines appropriate, and particularly if the component is a part of the DTD that a style sheet will interpret for display (or not, as a library and/or system vendor determines).”

The Study Group identified several benefits that would derive from this proposal, including:

- a separate, unique, distinct component makes explicit important information regarding the content and medium of a resource
- as the order and location of the component is not specified (DTD elements can be ordered according to style sheet specifications), there is flexibility as to how the “content/carrier” (or “content/medium”) information displays
- creation of a unique component, along with specification of its content, will help to focus the content of area 3 (i.e., truly unique/exceptional material), area 5, and, to some extent, area 7. Thus, terminology within each element will be more precise and distinct, addressing current problems with information overlap across related areas
- a separate component, rather than a named and ordered area within the current ISBD framework, may encourage rethinking of the numbering, naming, defining, and ordering of data elements for the future consolidated ISBD.

Having determined a unique place for designating content/carrier, or content/medium, the Study Group can now focus on what information to embed within that component (GMD), as well as within areas 3, 5, and 7. The Material Designation Study Group will work closely with the Future Directions Study Group, and will also liaise with the JSC appointed GMD/SMD Working Group whose initial report is expected shortly. Tom Delsey, editor of *Resource Description and Access* (RDA) will be consulted as appropriate or required for “sorting”, clarifying, and defining terminology as it evolves throughout the process.

To address another area of interest, the Review Group in 2002 established the ISBD Series Study Group. This effort reflected concerns that some inconsistencies and ambiguities appear to have developed regarding the rules for recording information in Area 6 for Series and related information presented in Area 7 for Notes. Taking into account relevant prescriptions from AACR2 and the ISSN Guidelines, this study group pursued three objectives:

- to clarify the purpose of area 6 and its relation with area 1 in ISBD(CR) and ISSN: identification or transcription;
- to verify the compatibility of sources of information recommended or prescribed in all ISBDs for area 6 and for area 1 in ISBD(CR) and ISSN, and
- to propose a common phrasing for area 6 in all ISBDs.

After circulation of discussion papers that made clear the complexity of the issues under investigation, the Group agreed that through all the ISBDs, Area 6 is mainly for transcription of data from the item being catalogued, and less for identification, and that obvious typographical errors should not be corrected. Meanwhile, the Study Group is also investigating problems related to sources of information for Area 6, taking into consideration the great variety of publication practices throughout the world in laying out bibliographic information regarding series and sub-series and inconsistent practices among national bibliographic agencies in treating such information. For example, some cataloguing agencies establish only main series, while others establish separate records for main series and sub-series, depending on the distinctive title of the sub-series, or of the existence of numbering. Another issue considered related to differences in prescribed sources, with the SG preferring, in the case of multi-volume

monographs, to give priority to the title page for the series when present.

On another front, just as the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR is undertaking a strategic reexamination of the organization and presentation of AACR/RDA, the Review Group decided that it too should consider the possibility of combining the ISBDs into a single document. Currently there are seven specialized ISBDs, plus the General ISBD. These ISBDs have been revised and published at various times, with no method for incorporating changes made in newer texts that affect all the ISBDs into the older texts. For example, when it was decided to incorporate decisions on what data elements should remain mandatory into the ISBDs based on those required in the Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records, these changes were incorporated into the ISBD(M) and the ISBD(CR) that were issued in 2002, although they applied to all of the ISBDs.

It was therefore decided in 2003 to set up a Study Group to determine the feasibility of consolidating the ISBDs, merging the stipulations that applied to all resources and providing for additional stipulations for resources that needed them. The SG decided that consolidation is feasible and began its work. It developed the following Objective and Principles.

The Objectives are as follow:

- To prepare a consolidated, updated ISBD from the specialized ISBDs in order to meet the needs of cataloguers and users of bibliographic information.
- To provide consistent stipulations for description of all types of resources to the extent that uniformity is possible, and specific stipulations for specific types of resources as required to describe those resources.

The Principles include:

- The primary purpose of the ISBD is to provide the stipulations for compatible descriptive cataloguing worldwide in order to aid the international exchange of bibliographic records between national bibliographic agencies and throughout the international library and information community (e.g. producers, publishers).
- The elements needed to identify a resource uniquely must be specified.
- National bibliographic agencies and national bibliographies will be addressed. This will also provide stipulations needed for university and other research collections.
- Sufficient descriptive information to enable access and retrieval and use of the resource must be provided.
- The core set of elements of information rather than the display or use of those elements in a specific automated system will provide the focus.
- Cost effective practices must be considered.

With Dorothy McGarry as chair, this Study Group met in April 2005. Before this meeting, there had been agreement on the feasibility of a consolidated ISBD. The Deutsche Bibliothek, which sponsored the meeting, had arranged to have matrices of each area prepared to collocate the same areas from each ISBD. Working from that basis, the SG members had refined the matrices to collocate elements within the areas from all of the ISBDs.

Agreement was reached on the general outline to be followed for each area. In addition, it was

decided to recommend that:

- the structure should be changed;
- present stipulations should fit into the new structure;
- some changes will be made due to the need to generalize wording;
- the GMD should be moved from after the title proper to another location;
- published (validated) versions will be used as the basis on which to work at the first stage;
- changes to stipulations can be made at a later stage.

Following up on this meeting, the Study Group held two productive meetings during the IFLA Oslo conference. It decided on a timeline for preparing a full proposal for harmonization of the published ISBDs, with comments for suggestions for updates and changes considered necessary for cataloguing at the present time. Another meeting of the Study Group membership is planned for early April 2006 at the DDB.

The current work plan and time-line are as follows: The Study Group will prepare a merged text for the ISBDs as they were published. This text will be presented, side-by-side with a column containing suggestions to the ISBD Review Group for changes from the published stipulations in addition to those made during the merger of the individual texts. Primary problems and suggestions will be highlighted for the Review Group to consider. By the end of December, this phase should be completed.

As mentioned, in Oslo the Review Group decided that further work on ISBD(ER) and ISBD(CM) should be postponed until summer 2006 in order to ensure that the Future Directions SG is able to focus on its initial task of harmonizing the existing, validated ISBDs and work on updating stipulations. However, the Future Directions Study Group will take into account provisions of the drafts of ISBD(ER) and ISBD(CM) during this phase of its work. The chair will also contact the chair of the International Association of Music Libraries ISBD group for updates that will be needed for the music aspects of the ISBDs.

Next, the Study Group will work on the stipulations, taking into consideration responses from Review Group members, in order to have a text ready for the spring 2006 meeting in Frankfurt. Problems left unresolved can be worked out there. The resulting text will be sent to the Review Group in June or July 2006 for a full discussion in Seoul at the IFLA conference. Following that meeting, the Study Group will revise the text and prepare a draft version for worldwide review in September-November 2006. Taking into account the responses received in that review, the Study Group will forward a recommended text to the Review Group for approval. In early 2007, the text will go to the Cataloguing Section Standing Committee for balloting.

Surveys comparing existing national and multinational cataloguing codes taken in preparation for these meetings of experts on an international cataloguing code have demonstrated conclusively that the ISBDs are used extensively as the basis for bibliographic description and usually with very little modification.⁶ The Review Group is prepared to work with the authors of these national cataloguing codes whenever there are concerns that we might address by way of improving the ISBDs. In particular, we have established an effective working relationship with

⁶ http://www.ddb.de/news/pdf/code_comp_2003_europe_2.pdf

the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR on matters of mutual interest. These collaborations as well as all the work that has gone into the development and maintenance of the ISBDs and the energy currently devoted to projects under way or in planning have depended mostly on the efforts of individual experts. I would like to close these remarks by expressing appreciation to these dedicated professionals for their many contributions to the advancement of the ISBD programme, which even today continues to represent one of IFLA's premier accomplishments in the area of cataloguing.